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ABSTRACT

Expectations of young adults concerning their future participation in four adult life roles (occupation, parenthood, marriage, homecare) were examined by comparing the responses of 301 male and 354 female college students from intact families, single-parent families, and stepfamilies on the Life Roles Salience Scales (LRSS). The results indicated that the subjects held a very positive set of expectations about the four adult life roles. Women demonstrated a significantly stronger indication of commitment to the roles of marriage, parenthood, and homecare and of valuing these roles somewhat more than did men. Men, in contrast, expressed significantly greater expectations regarding the value of the occupational role and their commitment to that role than did women. Students from single-parent families and from stepfamilies scored significantly higher in the Occupational Role Commitment Scale of the LRSS than did students from intact families. Most students indicated a high value for the marital role, with students from intact families placing a higher value on the marital role and anticipating more commitment to the work of the marital role than students from single-parent families and stepfamilies. In general, the data suggest a positive picture regarding the expectations with which young people are entering adult life. Information from this research can guide family life educators and students in explorations and discussion of various facets of family living. (NB)

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THE VALUE AND COMMITMENT TO WORK AND FAMILY ROLES: INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

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THE VALUE AND COMMITMENT TO WORK AND FAMILY ROLES: INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

An individual's attitudes and values of marriage, childrearing, work and family life influence their expectations and behaviors. Expectations in turn, serve as the basis for evaluating one's satisfaction in these work and family spheres of life (Amatea, et al, 1986; Kurdek & Fine, 1991; Voydanoff, 1987).Incongruence between expectation and experience leads to dissatisfaction demanding change of some sort. Do young adults with different early life experiences, as might be reflected in gender and in different family forms, have different expectations about their future adult life roles (Kennedy, 1991)? How might such differences relate to factors which previous research has associated with divorce-proness? This paper presents a report of young adult expectations of their participation in four adult life roles. It compares the responses of male and female young adults from intact, single-parent and stepfamilies on the 40-item Life Roles Salience Scales (LRSS). LRSS (Amatea, et al, 1986) assesses both the value the individuals attribute to four different life roles and also the commitment they expect to give to those roles. The four roles are: occupation, parenthood, marriage and homecare. Differences obtained in role expectations could add a further perspective to our understanding of intergenerational transmission of marital instability of children of divorce.

Participants were 301 men and 354 women enrolled in an undergraduate family living course at a midwestern university. Distribution of the respondents in the three family forms was as follows: 67% from intact families, 19% from single-parent families (including never married, widowed and divorced parents), and 14% from stepfamilies. Half of the respondents were from rural areas, a fourth were from cities between 25,000 and 100,000 people and the remaining fourth were from urban or suburban areas. Seventy-seven percent were White while 21% were African American and 2% other.

Results indicate that this group of 655 college student young adults held a very positive set of expectations about four adult life roles. These findings are important to keep in mind as recognition is given to current trends of later marriage and parenthood and of high probability of divorce. All participants in this study were under the age of 23 years and had not yet experienced the adult life roles they were asked to consider.

Therefore, this study was sampling the anticipations or expectations with which those students approach adult life roles.

Females demonstrated significantly stronger indication to be committed to the roles of marriage, parenthood and homecare and to value these roles somewhat more than did males. In contrast, males expressed significantly greater expectations regarding the value of the occupational role and their commitment to that role than did female respondents.

Students from single-parent and stepfamilies scored significantly higher on the Occupational Role Commitment Scale than did students from intact families. On the Occupational Role Value Scale, students from single-parent families were significantly higher than those from stepfamilies and intact families. Occupational Role Value emphasizes the importance of achievement, reputation, and the excitement found in job/career activities. Occupational Role Commitment indicates a willingness to be challenged, to devote time and effort and to sacrifice in order to advance in one's career.

Most students indicated a high value for the marital role (great personal satisfaction and fulfillment expected in the relationship of marriage), they also anticipated that successful marriages will require strong investments and are willing to make them. Students from intact families placed a higher value on the marital role and anticipated more commitment to the work of the marital role than did students from single-parent and stepfamilies. Similarly, students from intact families expressed higher value for and commitment to the parental role than did students in the other two family form groups.

Data from this study suggest a positive picture regarding the expectations with which young people are entering adult life. They expect that the care of their homes, the care of their family relationships and the responsibilities of their occupational life will be of high value and that they will make major commitments of time and resources to these. These expectations were expressed by young adults who had not yet entered into the life roles they were describing. How aware are they of potential role conflicts and needs for priority setting? How will they relate their parenting expectations with the seeming requirement of two-earner incomes to purchase a home? Does the fact that homecare scores were highest and occupational role lowest among the four adult roles suggest lack of awareness of possible role conflict?

Information from this research can guide family life educators and students in exploration and discussion of various facets of family living. For example, students might consider possible conflicts between expectations

to devote time and energy to occupational goals and the expectations to devote energies to marital and family roles. Or, will time required in occupational activities to earn money for homecare cancel out their expected time to enjoy their homes?

All family life educators attempt to keep in mind the uniqueness of each individual's life history and the fact that each person brings to the discussion of family a different perceptual base. Failure to keep this in mind and, by contrast, to proceed as though all participants had similar experiential backgrounds, meanings and goals, results in ineffective communication. Consideration of the information provided in this study can help family life educators communicate effectively with male and female young adults from single-parent and stepfamilies in their groups. The fact that mean scores for single-parent and stepfamily students differ somewhat from each other and more distinctly from intact family students highlights differences between groups. However, within each group there is also a range, demonstrating the variety of expectations among students in each group.

Where the situation permits, participants in family life education groups could profit by completing the LRSS and having the opportunity to express their own expectations for their life roles. Group discussion then might allow the participants to relate their own scores in each area to the continuum of scores for participants from different groups. The specific scores of the participant would not be as important as the opportunity the experience provided for the participants to clarify their life role expectations. Such exploration of expectations affords anticipatory socialization. Such discussions could help participants recognize differences between "role values" and "role commitments". Family life educators will underscore the worth of the contribution that each student's life experience brings to such discussions.

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Life Role Salience Scales

	LRSS Scale	Definition
1.	Occupational Role Value	– perceived satisfaction in job/career activities
2.	Occupational Role Commitment	– willingness to devote energies to career
3.	Marital Role Value	– perceived fulfillment in marriage
4.	Marital Role Commitment	– willingness to work on building marriage relationship
5.	Parental Role Value	– sees parenting as attractive, fulfilling role
6.	Parental Role Commitment	– willingness to apply time and energy to parenting
7.	Homecare Role Value	– pride in having an attractive, comfortable home
8.	Homecare Role Commitment	– willingness to devote time and energy to maintain home

Group Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Cronbach's Alphas for LRSS Scales

Scale	Means (n=655)	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
	(range = 5 to 25)		
Occupational Role Value	19.50	3.36	.64
Occupational Commitment	18.96	3.76	.75
Parent Role Value	21.13	4.32	.83
Parent Role Commitment	20.23	4.25	.79
Marital Role Value	20.65	3.85	.81
Marital Role Commitment	21.71	3.20	.64
Homecare Role Value	21.74	2.84	.73
Homecare Role Commitment	20.38	3.09	.60

Male and Female Means for Each LRSS Scale

LRSS Scales	Gender		
	Male (n=301)	Female (n=354)	F
Occupational Role Value	19.95	19.11	10.61**
Occupational Role Commitment	19.91	18.21	34.72***
Parental Role Value	20.82	21.32	2.19
Parental Role Commitment	19.65	20.61	8.51*
Marital Role Value	20.48	20.48	0.31
Marital Role Commitment	21.25	22.05	10.18**
Homecare Role Value	21.58	21.82	1.11
Homecare Role Commitment	20.03	20.71	7.00*

*p <.01 **p <.001 ***p <.0001

Mean Scores and Analysis for Variance of LRSS Scales by Family Form

LRSS Scales	Family Form			
	Intact (n=442)	S-Parent (n=123)	Step (n=91)	F
Occupational Role Value	19.26	19.91	19.19	3.53**
Occupational Role Commitment	18.58	19.47	19.86	5.38***
Parent Role Value	21.43	20.35	20.31	4.96***
Parent Role Commitment	20.40	20.08	19.00	4.55***
Marital Role Value	20.81	19.94	20.30	2.77*
Marital Role Commitment	21.90	21.19	21.16	4.40***
Homecare Role Value	21.74	21.63	21.71	.12
Homecare Role Commitment	20.31	20.61	20.41	.28

*p <.1 **p <.05 ***p <.01